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Guide to the

Philip Mazzei papers

1775-1785

MssCol 1927

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Compiled by Casey Babcock, 2015

Summary

Creator: Mazzei, Filippo, 1730-1816

Title: Philip Mazzei papers

Date: 1775-1785

Size: .21 linear feet (1 volume)

Source: Purchased from F.G. Sweet, 1925, with additional purchases 1927 and 1953.

Abstract: Filippo Mazzei (1730-1816), also known as Philip Mazzei, was an Italian physician, merchant, and agriculturist who served as state agent for Virginia in Europe during the American Revolution, from 1779 to 1782. The Philip Mazzei papers, dated 1775-1785, consist of letters and writings by Mazzei pertaining to his service as state agent for Virginia in Europe, 1779-1783, and letters to his friend and business associate John Page of Rosewell, Virginia, 1775-1785. Letters sent by Mazzei to Virginia governors Thomas Jefferson, 1779-1781, and Benjamin Harrison, 1782, along with two related narratives, describe his attempts to obtain aid for Virginia in the form of loans and supplies and to generally serve the American cause, as seen in his accounts of his social and business engagements and efforts to gather useful intelligence. Related writings consist of Mazzei's narrative of his capture and imprisonment by the British in 1779, and a comprehensive summary of his work and correspondence in Europe, particularly in France and Italy, from 1779 until his return to Virginia in 1783. Letters to John Page concern Mazzei's experience with viticulture in Virginia, difficulties with his work in Europe, and personal matters.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Philip Mazzei papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: Compiled by Casey Babcock, 2015

Creator History

Filippo Mazzei (1730-1816), also known as Philip Mazzei, was an Italian physician, merchant, and

agriculturist who served as state agent for Virginia in Europe during the American Revolution, from 1779 to 1782.

Born near Florence, Italy, he practiced medicine as a young man before emigrating to London, England in 1756. He established himself as a merchant, importing wine and olive oil with his partner Joseph Martin, whose widow he eventually married. While in England he met a number of prominent Americans, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Adams and others, leading to the formation of a company to promote the culture of silk worms, olives and grapes, with a related wine industry, in Virginia. After further arrangements in Italy, he sailed for Virginia in September, 1773, where he acquired a plantation for his agricultural pursuits, known as Colle, adjacent to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Jefferson and John Page of Rosewell, a Virginia politician and planter, were also involved in the venture and became his close friends. Mazzei was interested in public and political affairs and supported America in its struggle for independence. He collaborated with Thomas Jefferson in writing articles for the Virginia press, and briefly joined the Virginia militia in 1777 to help avert a sudden threat by British troops.

At Jefferson's recommendation, Governor Patrick Henry appointed Mazzei in January 1779 to travel to Europe as the state's envoy to obtain aid for Virginia in the form of loans and supplies, principally in Italy. He sailed with his family in June, but was captured en route by the British and taken to Ireland. Mazzei eventually escaped to France, sending his first report to Governor Jefferson in December, but was greatly hindered by the loss of his commission and other papers, thrown overboard just prior to his capture. Their delayed replacement, lack of instructions, and changing circumstances worked against his success. He left France for Italy in the summer of 1780, leaving Italy for Amsterdam in the fall of 1782, where he tried to repair his personal finances. Although Mazzei failed in his attempts to secure loans and supplies, he actively supported the American cause abroad and provided useful information to Jefferson in his reports. Mazzei received his letter of recall from Governor Harrison in August 1782, but remained in Europe to restore his credit, returning to Virginia in 1783. His services were reimbursed by the Virginia Board of Trade after his return, with a testimonial to his efforts.

When Mazzei's hope for a diplomatic post abroad did not materialize, he left his adopted country for France in 1785, obtaining employment in Paris and Warsaw from King Stanislaus of Poland. In 1788 he published a four-volume political history of the United States. His autobiography was published after his death at Pisa in 1816.

Scope and Content Note

The Philip Mazzei papers, dated 1775-1785, consist of letters and writings by Mazzei pertaining to his service as state agent for Virginia in Europe during the American Revolution, 1779-1783, and letters to his friend and business associate John Page of Rosewell, Virginia, 1775-1785.

Letters sent by Mazzei to Virginia governors Thomas Jefferson, 1779-1781, and Benjamin Harrison, 1782, along with two related narratives, describe his attempts to fulfill his mission to obtain loans in gold and silver for the state, to purchase supplies in Italy for use by the army, and to generally serve the American cause, as seen in his accounts of his social and business engagements and efforts to gather useful intelligence. Letters recount his departure from Virginia with his family en route to Europe, his capture and imprisonment by the British and his escape to France, his movements in France and Italy, difficulties caused by the loss of his papers and related financial problems, and encounters with European merchants and nobility and Americans abroad, including John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. Mazzei also provides intelligence on European political and military affairs in relation to America; reactions to American military events, such as the surrender of Charleston, South Carolina; and the

reception of wounded naval officer Count d'Estaing in France. His attempts to support the Revolution in his personal conversations and writings in the press are also described. Letters, numbered by Mazzei, include memoranda listing the means by which they were sent to America; some were carried by the Marquis de Lafayette and John Paul Jones. Related writings consist of Mazzei's narrative of his capture and imprisonment by the British, and a comprehensive summary of his work as agent entitled "A Representation of Mr. Mazzei's Conduct, from the time of his appointment to be Agent of the State until his return to Virginia." This document provides a detailed account of his correspondence, including content from letters not present in the collection. Letters to John Page, 1775-1785, concern Mazzei's experience with viticulture in Virginia, difficulties with his work in Europe, and personal matters.

Key Terms

Occupations

Agriculturists
Merchants

Geographic Names

Europe -- Politics and government -- 1775-1783
France -- Politics and government -- 18th century
Italy -- Politics and government -- 18th century
United States -- Foreign relations -- 1775-1783
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Foreign public opinion
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Personal narratives
United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Prisoners and prisons
Virginia -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783
Virginia -- Politics and government -- 1775-1783

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Memoirs

Subjects

Viticulture -- Virginia

Names

Estaing, Charles Henri, comte d', 1729-1794
Harrison, Benjamin, approximately 1726-1791 -- recipient
Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826 -- recipient
Mazzei, Filippo, 1730-1816
Page, John, 1744-1808 -- recipient

Container List

Letters to Thomas Jefferson

- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 1 1779 November 27
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 3 1779 December 12
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 4 1779 December 18
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 5 1780 February 8
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 6 1780 February 18
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 7 1780 March 2
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 8 1780 March 4
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 10 1780 April 4
Copy numbers 1 and 3
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 11 1780 April 10
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 12 1780 April 20
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 16 1780 May 19
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 19 1780 June 15
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 20 1780 June 22
Enclosed is a memorandum listing the means by which he sent his letters to Thomas Jefferson
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 23 1781 January 5
Enclosed is a continuation of the memorandum in Letter 20
- v. 1 f. 1 Letter 25 1781 April [August] 8
Date is given as 1781 August 8 in Mazzei's "Representation," dating Letter 24 as April 8 (not present in this collection)
- v. 1 f. 2 Letter to Benjamin Harrison 1782 April 26
Letter 33

Letters to John Page

- v. 1 f. 3 1775 February 11
- v. 1 f. 3 1777 January 11
- v. 1 f. 3 1778 May 24
- v. 1 f. 3 1780 November 12
2 copies
- v. 1 f. 3 1782 August 2
- v. 1 f. 3 1783 December 12
- v. 1 f. 3 1785 May 8

Documents

- v. 1 f. 4 Extract from the Gazette de France of January 25, 1780 undated
- v. 1 f. 5 Narrative of Mazzei's capture and imprisonment by the British 1780
Identified in Mazzei's "Representation" as an enclosure to Letter 9 to Thomas Jefferson dated 1780 March 19. Letter 9 is not present in this collection.
- v. 1 f. 6 "A Representation of Mr. Mazzei's Conduct, from the time of his appointment to be Agent of the State in Europe untill his return to Virginia" circa 1783